

<b>TRANSMITTAL SLIP</b>		DATE 19 Oct 81
TO: Bob Gates		
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REMARKS:  You might be interested in this collection of papers on the Soviet Union that I either picked up at conferences or that have been sent to me recently.		
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(47)

Soviet political institutions in the 80's :

The Military temptation

M. Tatu

September 1981

Paper for the "Internal and External Factors in Soviet behavior :  
Implications for the West " workshop, National Defense College,  
Latimer, England , September 25-27, 1981

Interfering with the 'Movement of History': What  
Constitutes a Threat to the Soviet Union?

Harry Gelman

September 1981

Prepared for the European American Institute workshop, "Internal  
and External Factors in Soviet Behavior: Implications for the West,"  
National Defence College, Latimer, England, September 25-27, 1981

MOSCOW'S TROUBLES OF EMPIRE: SO WHAT?

Fritz W. Ermarth  
Washington D.C.  
September 1981

Prepared for Workshop on "Internal and External Factors in Soviet Behavior:  
Implications for the West"; European American Institute for Security Research  
at the National Defense University, Latimer, England; 25-27 September 1981

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## LANGUAGE

### "Détente": a Semantic Post-Mortem

By Hugh Ragsdale



word itself.

The French noun *détente* means relaxation, of course, but relaxation of a peculiar kind. It is from the verb *détendre*, which means to relax through the release of a mechanism drawn taut with pressure. It means: to discharge; to unleash; to let go, as one would a spring or a rubber band. It is not surprising, then, that the noun *détente* also means the trigger of a gun, and therefore, logically, the condition of *détente* is one which follows a barrage or assault. Now this is not what we mean by it, of course; and we have simply made a silly mistake in the choice of terms. But, on the other hand, we have, since we began to use the term, unleashed an impressive barrage of human rights propaganda that has yet to find a relaxed Russian reception. Incidentally, the Russian terminology for *détente*, *razriadka napriazhennosti*, relaxation of pressure, is entirely analogous to the French (the Russian verb *razriadit'* meaning just what *détente* does). Whether the Russian terminology is appropriate to their objectives is not easy to know because of the controversy over their foreign policy and the closed nature of their society. As for our objectives, my impression is that our understanding of the process of *détente* reflects the anomalies of the term itself.

An older misunderstanding, and a far more serious one, is the problem of cultural incomprehension. We are accustomed to the strictures on Russia of Westerners like Giles Fletcher, Adam Olearius, the Baron Custine, and Karl Marx, John Milton's commentary, less well known, is much like the others':

"They have no learning, nor will suffer [it] to be among them; their greatest friendship is in drink-

ing; they are great Talkers, Lyars, Flatterers and Dissemblers."<sup>1</sup>

A century earlier, George Turberville, an emissary of Elizabeth I to Ivan IV, described them similarly in verse:

*Drinke is their whole desire, the pot is all their  
pride,  
The sobrest head doth once a day stand needfull  
of a guide.  
The cold is rare, the people rude, the prince so  
full of pride,  
The Realme so stored with Monks and nunnes,  
and priests on every side:  
The maners are so Turkie like, . . . the customes  
are so quaint,  
As if I would describe the whole, I feare my pen  
would faint.  
If thou be wise, as wise thou art, and wilt be rul'd  
by me,  
Live still at home, and covet not these barbarous  
coasts to see.  
Loe thus I make an ende: none other newes to  
thee,  
But that the countrey is too colde, the people  
beastly bee.<sup>2</sup>*

In the same tradition is our conventional view of Russian politics. Government, either Russian or Soviet, has been for a long time a malign conspiracy of men who just manage generation after generation to suppress the forces of decency, humanism, and liberalism which are the noble and inherent virtues of the Russian people. In this scheme of things, Russian statesmen are not merely nasty and utterly self-seeking, but they are unnatural as well, in all the vicious connotations of that term. And the forces of natural law and destiny work on the side of decency, humanism, and liberalism, though they have been unaccountably slow to do their work. A plausible account of the motives of these evil men is rarely attempted, because it is understood somehow that the government is as mysterious as it is malign, and hence the question of motivation is not considered a heuristically necessary part of the picture. I

<sup>1</sup> John Milton, *Works*, Vol. X (1937), pp. 339-352.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Hakluyt, *The Principal Voyages*, Vol. II (London, 1907), pp. 99-108.